

News Release



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Listening To The Public

Public Input Creates Changes For El Morro Mobile Home Park Conversion

CRYSTAL COVE STATE PARK -- The California Department of Parks and Recreation announced today that the public input received on the "El Morro Conversion to Campground and Day Use, Final Environmental Impact Report" has led to a number of positive recommendations and changes.

Orange Coast District Superintendent Mike Tope said " Our planning staff has been busy reviewing the many public comments sent to us in response to the plan. Those comments have given us valuable suggestions for how to improve the plan and we felt it was time to present an update to let people know we are listening and making improvements."

The major changes to the existing plan include the following:

- Expand the buffer area between El Morro Elementary School and the campground by shifting campsites further away from the El Morro Elementary School.
- Increase the height of the boundary berm to improve the physical separation between park and school activities. The berm will be a sculpted mounding up to eight feet in height that will include a variety of native vegetation to further buffer this separation.
- Remove the pedestrian crossing and intersection signal lights at Pacific Coast Highway near El Morro Creek.
- Improve beach access through the El Morro Creek tunnel under Pacific Coast Highway by improving ramps and walking surfaces to and from El Morro beach.
- Develop El Morro Campground Operations Plan that will include guidelines for restricting campfires during normal school hours.

The DRAFT El Morro Conversion Plan EIR (Environmental Impact Report) was first circulated to the public for review and comment between May 7 and June 21, 2001. In response, State Parks received comments from meetings, letters, e-mails, phone calls and began to examine the impact and suggestions contained in the comments. Those comments and suggestions led directly to the proposed changes being proposed and announced today. The next step in this process will be to refine the plan in accordance with the comments received and then proceed with the permitting process with the various public agencies involved.

The plan to convert the El Morro Mobile Home facility to a public park is part of the Crystal Cove State Park General Plan. That plan went through an extensive public input and planning process. Along with questionnaire surveys and newsletters, there was a series of 5 different public input meetings from March 1980 through May 1981, which resulted in a series of recommended planning alternatives.

The plan established approval for a campground for 60 individual campsites, day-use facilities for picnics, trailhead staging areas for hiking and equestrian use, along with parking facilities for public beach access. In addition, an extensive environmental restoration of Morro Creek is planned. It will include returning the creek to a natural waterway with native vegetation and wildlife habitat areas.

Conversion on Schedule in Three Phases

The public park conversion is now underway in three phases, as outlined below: (The present state budget crisis has no bearing on funding allocated for this project, that funding is allocated under Proposition 12, The State Parks Bond Act of 2000, and not revocable.)

1. **Preliminary Plan Phase** – This phase is now underway, with money encumbered and now being spent. This phase is funded by \$2,118,000, earmarked and established from Proposition 12, the Parks Bond Act of 2000, and included in the Governor's 2000-2001 budget. The work items include topographic survey, natural and cultural resource investigations, schematic drawings, and CEQA preparation, along with preliminary plans and cost estimates. A large portion of these funds is also earmarked for annexation to the local sewer district and sewer connection costs. Again, these tasks are well underway with money already spent and any effort now to stop the project would result in large portions of the \$2.1 million having been lost.
2. **Working Drawing Phase** -- Funding for this phase, \$803,000, has been earmarked and established from Proposition 12, the Park Bonds Act of 2000. These funds will enable state parks to obtain all the necessary permits, finalize construction drawings, specifications and cost estimates and prepare a bid for package for release.
3. **Construction Phase** – Funding for this phase, \$10,072,000, has likewise been earmarked and established from Proposition 12, the Parks Bond Act of 2000. This funding will enable state parks to actually advertise the bid for construction of the project, award the construction contract, complete the construction and open the facility for public occupancy.

Construction Ready to Go In 2005

The above stated phasing means that by the time the lease expires for the mobile home residents in December 2004, State Parks will have the planning, funding and contract selection completed and the project will be ready for construction in 2005. This is a project that is on track and ready to go with all necessary pieces of the public use plan moving ahead.

The El Morro trailer park occupies the only site within Crystal Cove State Park where the public has direct access between both the coastal, beach areas and the upland canyons and trails. That means it is the only area within the park where one can park in one spot and either hike the upland trails or walk to the beach. For that reason, it is considered the hub of the park, a place that will dramatically open up new coastal access and recreational opportunities.

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